BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5447 JANUARY 16, 1978
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THE KRIL: SEARCH FOR PROTEIN

ANNCR:

INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES WITH LARGE FISHING FLEETS HAVE STARTED LOOKING IN THE DIRECTION OF ANTARCTICA TO OBTAIN FOOD FOR THEIR GROWING POPULATIONS. AS WE HEAR IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT BY VOA'S LARRY LESUEUR.

VOICE:

ONE RESULT OF THE PROLIFERATION OF NATIONAL 200-MILE COASTAL FISHING ZONES IS THE INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION NOW BEING DIRECTED TO ONE OF THE LAST AND LARGEST UNTAPPED SOURCES OF PROTEIN LEFT ON EARTH . . . THE TINY KRIL OF THE ANTARCTIC SEAS.

THESE LITTLE CRUSTACEANS RESEMBLING SHRIMP FORM THE STAPLE DIET OF BALEEN WHALES, INCLUDING THE BIG RIGHT WHALES. BUT WHALES, OF COURSE ARE GETTING SCARCER, ALTHOUGH THEIR FOOD SUPPLY CONTINUES TO BE PLENTIFUL, ESPECIALLY IN ANTARCTIC WATERS SO ABUNDANT THAT ITS ESTIMATED THAT AT LEAST 100 MILLION TONS OF ANTARCTIC KRIL COULD BE HARVESTED YEARLY. THAT'S ABOUT THIRTY PERCENT MORE THAN THE AVERAGE ANNUAL WORLDWIDE FISH CATCH DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS.

THE SOVIET UNION, WHICH HAS FISHED OFF ANTARCTICA FOR MORE THAN TEN YEARS, HAS STARTED CONCENTRATING ON KRIL. IT NOW MARKETS A VARIETY OF KRIL PRODUCTS, RANGING FROM A HIGH PROTEIN FOOD ADDITIVE TO A SANDWICH SPREAD AS WELL AS WHOLE, FROZEN KRIL. THE TASTE OF KRIL-BASED PRODUCTS, IT'S SAID, RUNS FROM LOBSTER TO FISHMEAL. THE SOVIET UNION APPEARS TO BE PREPARING THEIR BELLINGHAUSEN RESEARCH STATION ON THE SOUTH SHETLAND ISLANDS AS A SUPPORT BASE FOR THEIR ANTARCTIC FISHING FLEET.

THE JAPANESE HAVE MAINTAINED A PILOT FISHERY FOR KRIL FOR SEVERAL YEARS DURING THE ANTARCTIC SUMMER. LAST YEAR THEIR FLEET OF FIVE SHIPS DELIVERED 12 THOUSAND TONS OF FROZEN KRIL TO JAPANESE MARKETS. WEST GERMANY AND POLAND, TWO COUNTRIES WITH LIMITED COASTAL FISHING ZONES ARE ALSO SAID TO BE READY TO SURVEY THE ANTARCTIC KRIL RESOURCE. CHILE AND THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA HAVE EXPLORED THE POSSIBILITY OF A JOINT KRIL FISHING VENTURE. TAIWAN WOULD PROVIDE THE FISHING EXPERTISE AND THE CHILEANS, WHO ARE, OF COURSE, CLOSER TO THE KRIL FISHING GROUNDS, WOULD SUPPLY THE LAND SUPPORT AND PROCESSING FACILITIES.

ALL THESE COUNTRIES, WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND WEST GERMANY HAVE SIGNED THE 1961 ANTARCTIC TREATY, WHICH IS CONCERNED WITH ANTARCTIC RESOURCES. AND ALL THE THIRTEEN NATIONS WHICH SIGNED THE TREATY, INCLUDING THE UNITED STATES, AGREED AT THEIR SEPTEMBER CONSULTIVE MEETING IN LONDON, TO REGULATE THE FISHING OFF ANTARCTICA BEFORE THE END OF THIS YEAR. BUT, FIRST, THE NEGOTIATORS WILL HAVE TO AGREE ON HOW TO MANAGE THE RESOURCE, ALLOCATE IT EQUITABLY, AND ENFORCE THE AGREEMENT.

JS/PBM